

# WEST VIRGINIA

## GEOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC SURVEY



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C. Edward Gaunch, *Commerce Cabinet Secretary*  
B. Mitchel Blake, Jr., *Director and State Geologist*



September 16, 2019

Congressman Raul Grijalva, Chairman  
House Natural Resources Committee  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

The West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey (WVGES), as part of the Association of American State Geologists, writes to support the important U.S. Geological Survey's National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program (NGGDPP). This program provides valuable resources to State Geological Surveys to help preserve various types of geological data and samples that are at risk of loss, yet are imperative to developing and improving understanding of the nation's resources and helping to safeguard the citizens against geological hazards.

In West Virginia, NGGDPP funding has allowed WVGES to collect, curate, and inventory various types of data and physical samples that have provided insights unforeseen when the samples were initially collected—often many decades prior. This includes the implementation of barcode tracking for the Oil and Gas Program's core and well cuttings collection. Over the past four years, NGGDPP funding has been utilized to add barcode tracking to well cuttings samples from 50 of the State's 55 counties, and to re-box, photograph and make digitally available data from several cores that form a cornerstone of the collection. Many of the cores were stored in deteriorating boxes, which left the samples at risk for total loss. Data associated with these collections are now available through the National Catalog, which allows researchers to remotely review and access information pertaining to more than a century of oil and gas development in the Appalachian Basin. Many of the cores are from old, no longer producing plays and could be deemed of no importance. Interestingly, these cores currently are being studied to test the feasibility of injecting carbon dioxide either as a driver for new production or as pure CO<sub>2</sub> sinks to combat climate change.

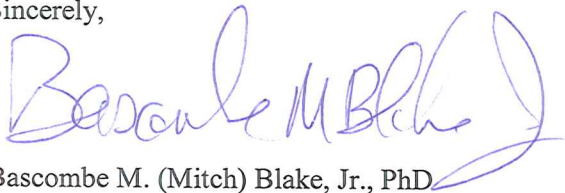
WVGES also holds and maintains many generations of aerial photographs that have proven useful for multiple purposes, including property boundary disputes, right of way determinations, and pipeline and highway construction. The value of collecting, and more importantly, maintaining geologic samples is further evidenced by WVGES' large coal sample library, containing over 11,000 coal samples amassed largely during the 1970s and 1980s. After analysis was completed and withstanding several moves, these samples were nearly discarded as essentially "in the way" and valueless. Recent interest in rare earth elements (REEs) and other strategic minerals has rendered these samples invaluable and many have been analyzed for REEs, providing valuable information as to the distribution of critical metals in the Appalachian Basin. Most of these samples are from long closed coal mines and could never have been recollected. If these samples had been discarded, our knowledge of REE distribution would have suffered.

The list of important information that is lost by shortsighted discarding of data and samples is large. In addition to the samples cited above, WVGES currently maintains, with the help of NGGDPP funding, large databases of coal mine maps, a comprehensive collection of deep coal exploration cores, as well as databases on landslides, karst, and springs, among others.

As a member of the Association and the State Geologist of West Virginia, WVGES strongly supports continuation, and if possible, an expansion of this important program.

Please feel free to contact me at (304) 594-2331 or ([blake@geosrv.wvnet.edu](mailto:blake@geosrv.wvnet.edu)) to discuss this important issue further. I thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bascombe M. Blake, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bascombe M. (Mitch) Blake, Jr., PhD  
Director and State Geologist